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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 008538

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SUBJECT: KISANGANI OBSERVATIONS AND IMPRESSIONS (II)

REF: KINSHASA 8532

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR WILLIAM LACY SWING FOR REASONS 1.5  
(B) (D)

1. (C) Following is the second and final part of a report on an Embassy staff member's visit to Kisangani November 28-December 1. This message covers the political and economic situation in Kisangani.

2. (C) Political Situation

Emboff accompanied a Human Rights Law Group representative on a courtesy visit to the "Governor" of Orientale Province. Making his case for US assistance, the Governor explained how the international community had ignored the province. He stressed full support for Congolese territorial integrity and implementation of Lusaka. Echoing a widely-held Kinshasa view, he asserted that the US could stop the war with a phone call if it really wanted to. The presence at the meeting of the provincial head of security was interpreted by Civil Society officials as evidence that the governor is on shaky terms with his Goma mentors. (Kisangani Civil Society generally believes that Kisangani RCD officials are not completely trusted in Goma. At any rate, they receive meager support from Goma.)

By all accounts, the Rwandan-supported occupation of Kisangani is somewhat less oppressive than in Bukavu and Goma although the population detests the RCD. Human rights groups are strong and continue to have access to private local radio and television. Few felt that there was much attempt to control communications. On the other hand, the RCD is installing political "cells" in all businesses and institutions. Emboff had no opportunity to speak with Archbishop Monsengwo, who was otherwise occupied the entire period of the visit. The general impression was, however, that the bishop's popularity may have suffered somewhat as the population seeks greater signs of peaceful resistance to RCD occupation.

The Hema-Lendu conflict of Bunia in eastern Orientale Province has had repercussions in Kisangani, tending as it has to polarize the large numbers of the intellectual elite of both groups living in the city. Despite human rights organizations' reconciliation efforts, a high level of tension remains. Both Hema and Lendu groups have been exciting their membership via use of video footage showing the bodies of their respective ethnic group being killed by the other.

The working environment for national and international NGOs in Kisangani is mixed. There is considerable harassment in the form of petty taxes; as a result international NGOs recently formed a joint "solidarity" committee in order to confront the government with one voice. The "governor" is not highly regarded among NGOs. E.g., he reportedly tried to ensnare MSF/Belgium in a corruption scam. Other international NGOs (ICRC, IRC, MSF/Holland, Oxfam) protested via a joint letter in support of MSF/Belgium, threatening to take the matter to RCD headquarters in Goma if necessary.

3. (C) Isolation and "Balkanization"

Two themes recur in nearly all discussions with Civil Society and others in Kisangani: first, that Kisangani is isolated, effectively cut off from the rest of the Congo both east and west, as well as largely ignored by the rest of the world. From the "governor" on down, everyone in Kisangani bemoaned this and expressed appreciation for foreigners who now come for more than a same day visit. Kisangani's pride is hurt, as residents have watched the Congo's third largest city become something of a backwater village neglected by politicians, humanitarian aid workers, development agencies, and diplomats. All pointed out repeatedly that Goma and Bukavu get all the attention. Notwithstanding, the visitor found Kisangani far from "dead", but rather surprisingly vibrant for a community with so few resources and outside connections.

The second common strain of most conversations in Kisangani is the perceived "balkanization" of the province. Residents are bitter and resentful that the international

community seemed to be doing nothing to prevent this. They can no longer travel freely around the province, both because of a pre-travel authorization requirement and because of security. (To travel to Buta, for example, one needs to leave RCD/Goma territory and enter MLC territory. To travel to Bunia, one needs to enter the "RCD-National" territory of Roger Lumbala and then navigate through the territories of the three competing rebel groups in the Bunia-Butembo-Beni area.) It is obvious to local residents that Orientale province has ceased being a province and deteriorated into a number of fiefdoms dominated by various strongmen (including Ugandans and Rwandans).

#### 14. (C) Economic Situation

As throughout the Congo, these are very hard times economically for Kisangani. Kisangani suffers more from the war than do some other areas in that the armed conflict has cut off the city from all of its major trade partners. E.g., there has been no river traffic with Mbandaka and Kinshasa to the west for two years now, with major economic repercussions. Though the city is commonly thought of as being commercially and politically more tied to the east than to the west, local traders suggest that this is largely a misconception, since all of Kisangani's major commercial enterprises traded more with Kinshasa than with the east, taking advantage of lower-cost river transportation. The only river traffic now are canoes that come upstream with limited agricultural produce. Even these, however, have diminished greatly in number, as the number of "roadblocks" for "taxes" on the river has blossomed (fifteen or so between Kisangani and Bumba, and three between Yangambi and Kisangani alone), making this route no longer profitable for even small-time traders. To the north and east, roads are insecure and in poor condition. There the frequency of trucks being ambushed has caused vehicular traffic to disappear completely. This limits Kisangani to dependence either on bicycle transporters or aircraft from the east for virtually everything but locally-available agricultural produce. Few companies in the east have attempted large-scale importing, however, perhaps for lack of large aircraft. As a result, according to an OCHA investigation, food prices in Kisangani are considerably higher than in Goma.

#### 15. Diamond Trade Moves Away

Interlocuteurs repeatedly pointed out to Emboff that the diamond trade which traditionally constituted the city's economic base has moved away from Kisangani. A little-known consequence of the Rwanda-Uganda "six-day" war in Kisangani and the subsequent withdrawal of the Ugandans is that although Kisangani itself remained in the RCD/Goma (i.e. Rwandan) sphere of influence, the Ugandans retained control of most of the diamond-producing areas, which lie to the northeast and northwest of the city. As diamonds now go out directly via northern routes to Kampala, Kisangani is largely bereft of the diamond trade. The Kisangani diamond trader who received an RCD monopoly on diamond exports eventually gave up and left town because he could not raise enough revenue from new diamonds to pay \$100,000 in monthly taxes required in return for the monopoly. Many believe that Kisangani's inaccessibility to diamond revenue may have been the underlying reason that the RCD sent troops into MLC territory in mid-November. As is often reported of areas where Rwandan soldiers control diamond-producing areas, Ugandan soldiers do not pay appropriate prices for diamonds. Diggers are forced to sell only to Ugandans who conspire to keep prices low. Civil Society leaders in Kisangani also suspect that coltan and niobium are also being exported in significant quantities from Orientale Province directly to Uganda and Rwanda.

SWING